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Commentary

Nurses play a critical role in healthcare reform



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China's government is committed to transforming its healthcare system into a strong and productive service for its nation's peoples. As such, the government seeks out groups in healthcare services that embody a pioneering spirit, exemplified by creation and successful implementation of innovative strategies. We are pleased to announce that the Chinese Nursing Association (CNA) has been recognized as one of these outstanding groups and awarded State funding to support its Science and Society Capacity Building Projects.

The aims of these projects span a broad spectrum in healthcare services, including: *Innovation to Improve Service Capability*, through which we develop national training programs and expand the knowledge in a wide range of disciplines practiced in China's nursing care as well as foster a spirit of collaboration with nursing professionals around the world; *Public Health and Governmental Collaboration*, through which we improve and add services to the community while strengthening the national agenda and governmental capacity to serve Chinese citizens; *Bench-to-Bedside Translational Medicine*, through which we train research nurses in science and technology in order to facilitate the direct application of scientific research findings to benefit society; and *Self-Development*, through which we develop and enhance self-sustaining

capabilities to better serve our members. All of these efforts are carried out with the principle objective of integrating the inherent strengths of Chinese society into a modern approach to improving healthcare.

1. Step 1, Innovation to improve service capability

1.1. Developing leadership skills for establishing sustainable and universal healthcare coverage

The population dynamics of China are changing and these changes represent new challenges to our healthcare system. The success of achieving a longer life span has been accompanied by increasing demands for geriatric care, community and health counseling services (increasing the need for community-based nursing in particular), and long-term disease management (such as for chronic conditions), to name a few. The efforts of the CNA to address and resolve these challenges will be substantially promoted by the newly-awarded State funding. In particular, the State funding will be used to support training of nurse educators (teaching

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nurses) in city and county hospitals, to implement the Hundred Nurse Managers Training Program for strengthening nurses' leadership in metropolitan general hospitals, and to carry out our Grassroots Comprehensive Ability Training Program for nurses serving county hospitals. The State funding will cover these various projects for a 3-year period and involve nurses working throughout various provinces in China, ultimately enhancing the intellectual and practical abilities of our nurses nationwide and promoting universal healthcare coverage in China.

1.2. Establishing collaborative national and international learning environments

The nationwide approach of CNA training will foster a collaborative learning environment, which will expand our trainees' desire for knowledge and experience beyond their geographic and demographic boundaries. Our goal is to instill an understanding of the importance of nurse training on an international level, whereby CNA trainees are able to recognize and take advantage of the strengths of the most advanced and effective nursing practices from across the globe. The 2013 annual assessment of the CNA Academic Nursing Program showed that our trainings strengthen international communication and intellectual exchange among nurse educators, thereby promoting the international influence of China's nurses. Another important aspect of these wide-reaching training efforts is the CNA-sponsored English journal publication, the *International Journal of Nursing Sciences (IJNSS)*. The *IJNSS* has not only provided insightful reports on improved and innovative nursing practices but has served as an internationally-renowned platform to attract technical experts and top nursing scholars from other nations so they may further mentor China's nurses through their service as peer-reviewers or editorial board members. To further promote these objectives, we have implemented a convenient online submission/editing/publication system and an open access publication model – with all *IJNSS* published articles being freely available as downloadable full-text documents in the ScienceDirect database; the first phase of our online publication approach began March 19, 2014. We anticipate these collective efforts to establish the *IJNSS* as a showcase of China's nursing talent and expertise, highlighting the successes of our nursing care outcomes and further promoting the global exchange of innovative ideas in both academic and practical nursing.

1.3. Expanding the range of disciplines in China's nursing services

The CNA also actively works to expand and enhance the nursing disciplines practiced throughout China. The sudden and extensive devastation caused by the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, especially in Wenchuan (the epicenter of the quake), showcased the important role that nurses play in disaster relief and exposed a need for increased training in this nursing discipline. The CNA collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) China office to develop the Disaster Medical Education for Nurses Training Project. After being awarded

financial support, nurses from a large number of provinces in China received practical training in disaster relief, which enhanced overall interest in rescue nursing as a discipline. In addition, the first Chinese guidelines on Disaster Nursing were drafted and the CNA established the Professional Committee of Disaster Care. Ultimately, our efforts and devotion to this discipline were rewarded by membership in the World Society of Disaster Nursing. In 2014, we were honored to host the Third World Conference on Disaster Nursing in Beijing; the programs were thoughtfully designed to fill the gaps in knowledge and practice of disaster nursing while playing on the strengths of its history from an international perspective.

2. Step 2, Public health and governmental collaboration to improve community-based services

2.1. Defining and expanding the roles of nurses in promoting health policies

The CNA has used the Long-Term Talent Development Plan (2010–2020) prepared by China's Ministry of Health to guide its activities in training effective medical and health personnel. These efforts have included nursing research team building, to develop strategic plans targeting the following challenges currently facing China's nursing healthcare: the on-going and anticipated shortfall in nurse manpower, by devising programs to grow the nursing workforce in number; the insufficient nurse personnel training, by devising programs to improve the overall skill and knowledge of nurses; the uneven nursing representation across different regions and levels of society, by devising programs to promote even geographic and demographic distribution of nurses meeting uniform standards of training; the limited numbers of nurse practitioners in specialized fields, by expanding knowledge and promoting interest in areas with underrepresentation in nursing care. This strategic planning approach will allow comprehensive development of key areas of care and of care specialist systems, using team building nurses and involving the latest advances in medical science and technology to best meet the healthcare needs of China's peoples.

2.2. Expanding nurses' contributions to the formulation of state policies governing healthcare practices

China's nurses were represented at the most recent annual meeting of China's Ministry of Health. The nursing representatives attended two sessions of this meeting and presented the needs for a national safeguard to ensure protection of legitimate rights and interests of China's nurses and the need to improve the overall treatment of nurses, as well as myriad other policy proposals related to the current challenges facing the nursing field. This experience highlighted the importance of nurses' participation in politics to contribute their rich knowledge and experience to help guide necessary reforms in national healthcare policies that will support the continual improvement of nursing care and its influence on the well-being of the nation's peoples. The innovative policies that

will come out of this collaboration between nurses and the government policy-makers will ultimately improve the ability of both nurses and the government to serve the public. Working together, these two bodies of concerned citizens will develop and implement innovative services. For its role, the CNA is honored to expand its social influence, helping to establish a good social image for its nurses and their expertise and care. The CNA aims to use this experience to enhance the attractiveness of nursing as a career and the cohesiveness of its members between one another. In this way, the CNA will be able to continue to play an important role in promoting the activities of nurses in improving human health and nurses' education, in no small part by contributing to the development of social and economic policy changes.

3. Step 3, Bench-to-bedside translational medicine to facilitate practical application of innovative research findings

3.1. Nurses' contributions towards advancing the practice of nursing

Science and technology are primary driving forces behinds innovation in nursing practices. Research nurses lead the field in advancing both established and new nursing disciplines, in practical care as well as in professional management strategies. In 2009, the Chinese Ministry of Science established the Science and Technology Award, which was set forth to be held every two years and culminated in State-provided funding for innovative projects to improve human health and healthcare. The extensive efforts in these subjects carried out by the CNA led to our being awarded this honorable funding reward to continue and enhance our efforts. The CNA used a portion of this reward to fund scientific research projects devised and conducted by our members; specifically, we sought to fund evidence-based research projects investigating nursing care problems that affect the modern day nursing practice. The findings of these research projects are expected to increase the capacity of the CNA and its members to help develop effective national standards of care. A long-reaching goal of CNA's involvement in supporting nursing research projects is to establish an international reputation for China as a leader in innovative and expert nursing practices.

3.2. Nurses' roles as healthcare consultants

The collaboration between the CNA and the Provincial Nursing Association has facilitated the success of our efforts to establish a uniform standard of knowledge and skill for nurses across geographic and demographic boundaries within China. For example, nurses trained through this partnership will carry the same comprehensive level of skill by which to care for patients whether they are walking into an urban-based organization or a village-based service provider. The programs conducted under this partnership include training in chronic disease management and launch of the "United Nations Diabetes Day". The latter allowed for partnering with regional community outreach organizations to carry out demonstrations of the correct method by which individuals should measure their blood sugar, presentations of a video-taped science lecture on "Understanding Diabetes – To Protect Our Future," live expositions about issues currently important for Chinese health. These activities also served to strengthen the working bond with other nurses in the community, so as to promote more efficient implementation of uniform health policies and practices to help provide equally skilled healthcare across the nation.

4. Fourth, self-development

As China actively works to reform and improve its healthcare system, specialized healthcare societies such as the CNA can play a critical role in helping the government to devise effective policies and to develop innovative programs. As such, it is crucial that the CNA continues its efforts to strengthen its membership and improve the knowledge, skills and perspectives of its members. One of the new fields that all nurses need to pay attention to is information management. Healthcare practice in all disciplines and at any geographic/demographic level will benefit from the establishment of an information network system; such databases will not only involve patient information but also nurses' information so that "care experts" can be quickly identified and recruited from among members that are conveniently located and willing to serve, either by providing care or education. This type of self-development approach will ultimately promote the development of the entire healthcare services industry throughout China and improve our national healthcare status.